

Wednesday, June 15, 2005

Duxbury Clipper

9

Red Tide Sticking Around

By LAUREN GRILLI

Toxic algae known as red tide has moved south of Duxbury, but left a trail of contaminated shellfish in its wake.

"There's no relief in sight," said Harbormaster Don Beers. "Red tide is stronger than ever."

Duxbury sent new shellfish samples to the Division of Marine Fisheries' lab early Monday morning for more tests and data collection, said Beers, who has watched the red tide progress over the past three weeks since the state closed area waters.

"Now, it's more than a mere inconvenience," Beers said. "We're starting to worry about public health and the economy."

Legislators, too, are beginning to worry about the welfare of Massachusetts' shellfishermen. The persistence of red tide has prompted members of the Massachusetts Congressional delegation, including Duxbury's Congressman William Delahunt, to address letters to the governor requesting financial help for shellfishing families that are affected by red tide.

"This disaster will have an extraordinary impact on our fishermen and their families who depend upon seasonal income to survive year-round," Delahunt wrote. "It will also affect the profitability of many other small businesses."

Although it seems that red tide has temporarily crippled the shellfish industry, local shellfishermen and restaurant owners remain calm and optimistic.

"We're not losing oysters, and we're not losing gear, just another week's pay," said Bill Bennett of Island Creek Oysters.

The past three weeks haven't been a total waste of time, either, for Island Creek.

"We've been busy doing this," said Bennett, gesturing to piles of freshly cleaned equipment.

"Of course, we hope it gets over real fast," said fellow shellfisherman Steve Gilbert. "But it's a part of the industry - hurricanes, red tides, ice, disease - it's all part of the industry."

Local restaurant owners who have taken shellfish off of their menus seem disappointed, but not devastated.

"It's sad, because we take

pride in our local fisheries," said David O'Connell of the Winsor House, which buys their oysters from Island Creek.

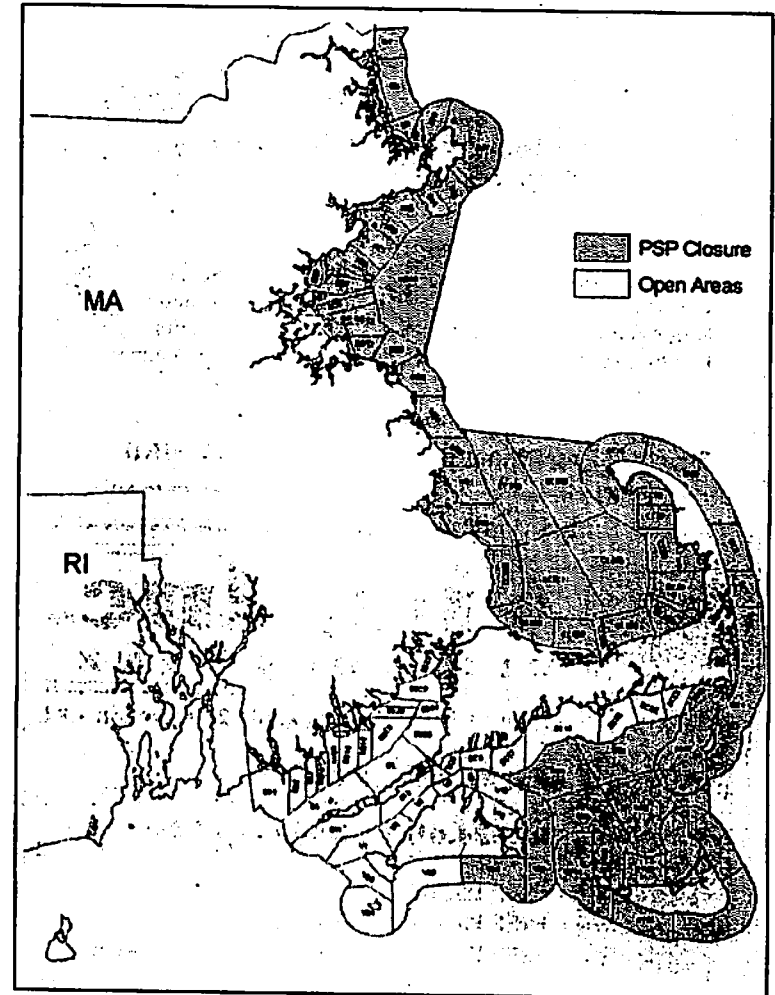
"But red tide is not having a disastrous effect on us. It's an inconvenience, but it's not a hardship."

Bud Johnson of the Milepost said that he believes people from outside of the area haven't been ordering clams or other shellfish because of red tide. "Our customer base has knowledge of what's going on," he said.

Duxbury Health Agent Jennifer Dalrymple said that the Board of Health has been educating the public about paralytic shellfish poisoning, which is what happens when contaminated shellfish is eaten.

According to the Division of Marine Fisheries, symptoms of poisoning include a feeling of numbness in the mouth, stiffness in limbs, difficulty breathing and a rapid pulse.

"The harbormaster and the Division of Marine Fisheries have done a great job making people aware of the situation," she said. "We don't expect anyone to get sick."



Waters along the coast of Massachusetts have been closed to shellfishing, as ordered by the Division of Marine Fisheries.

At this point, according to shellfishermen and the harbormaster, all that can be done is to wait it out.

"It's amazing how Mother Nature can put you in circumstances you can't control," said Beers. "She holds

all the cards."

"You have to be naïve to be in this business and not expect this," added Bennett. "It's a part of the business. And it's why this business is not for everybody."